EDITORIAL COMMENT

This department of California and Western Medicine presents editorial comment by contributing members on items of medical progress, science and practice, and on topics from recent medical books or journals. An invitation is extended to every member of the California and Nevada Medical Associations to submit brief editorial discussions suitable for publication in this department. No presentation should be over five hundred words in length.

Lipoids, Proteins, and Emetin Intravenously for Peptic Ulcer.—A few years ago George B. Pitkin, M. D., of Bergenfield, New Jersey, introduced a mixture of procain, starch, and strychnin for "controllable spinal anesthesia." This mixture was marketed by the H. A. Metz Laboratories, Inc., a subsidiary of Drug, Inc., under the registered trade-marked name of "Spinocaine." The more critical observer must have wondered at the rationale of including strychnin, a dangerous spinal irritant, in a mixture proposed for subarachnoid injection.

Recently George B. Pitkin, M. D., has proposed a mixture of proteins, lipoids, and emetin for intravenous injection for the treatment of peptic ulcer.[1] Although meticulous directions for the administration of this mixture are offered by Pitkin the exact composition of the mixture is not stated, and no indication is given of the amount of emetin present in it. As may be imagined, Pitkin's report on the effects of this treatment in peptic ulcer is rather uncritical, and it is obvious that whatever beneficial results were obtained were probably due to the admitted use of what was essentially a Sippy diet along with this extraordinary intravenous medication.

The grounds upon which emetin are included in the mixture proposed are very vague and there is no real evidence to indicate that this very dangerous alkaloid is of any value at all in peptic ulcer.

The purpose of this comment is to call attention to the danger of attempting to treat such a chronic condition as peptic ulcer by the repeated intravenous injection of unknown amounts of emetin. It has been shown by California workers that emetin is very slowly excreted, that it is accumulative in effect and that toxic symptoms are liable to be encountered in man whenever a total dosage of ten milligrams per kilogram is exceeded, even over a relatively long period of administration.[2] That the dangers of the intravenous use of emetin is common knowledge is indicated by the editorial reply to a query from one of Pitkin's New Jersey colleagues,[3] which appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association.*

Pitkin's mixture of protein, lipoids, and emetin for intravenous injection for the treatment of peptic ulcer is now marketed by the H. A. Metz Laboratories, Inc., a subsidy of Drug, Inc., under the registered trade-marked name of "Synodal," which is stated to be a "brand of Emetabol." The literature supplied by this company regarding the mixture fails to indicate the amount of emetin in the mixture, following the example set by Pitkin in his publication. In view of the well-known dangers of the intravenous use of emetin it would seem that the least this company could do in exploiting Pitkin's work would be to state the amount of emetin in the mixture offered for sale. The burden of proof in this matter remains upon Pitkin and upon the company marketing his proposed mixture. Until reasonable proof is offered that this remarkable treatment is really effective in peptic ulcer, and until the manufacturers indicate the amount of emetin in the mixture offered for intravenous use, it would seem wise for physicians generally to show some of that skepticism for the lack of which the profession is sometimes so notorious.

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Mussels and Clams: A Seasonal Quarantine—Bicarbonate of Soda as a Factor in the Prevention of Mussel Poisoning.—Each year, since 1927, the California Board of Public Health has established a quarantine on mussels during the summer months when these shellfish are toxic. Recently a similar quarantine has been placed upon clams because of a toxic condition that has been discovered in them. These quarantines, naturally, have resulted in protests from some of the individuals who are engaged in the commercial distribution of clams and mussels. It would seem to be in order, therefore, that the essential facts relative to the need for the exercise of quarantine measures be enumerated. Since the author of this article has been engaged in research work connected with the investigation of clams and mussels, his familiarity with every detail of the problem may entitle him to discuss the relationship between the scientific investigations and the practical measures that are concerned with the solutions of the many problems associated with the prevention of shellfish poisonings.

In 1927 an outbreak of mussel poisoning involving more than 100 cases constituted almost a catastrophe. Most of these cases occurred in San Francisco and its immediate vicinity. The California Board of Public Health established a quarantine on these shellfish shortly after the first cases had been reported and a scientific investigation was undertaken immediately by the Hooper Foundation for Medical Research of the Uni-

1 Pitkin, George B.: A New Treatment of Peptic Ulcer, Am. J. Surg., N. S., 12:466 (June), 1931.

2 Anderson, Hamilton H.: The Oral Toxicity of Emetin Hydrochlorid. Am. J. Trop. Med., 10:249 (July), 1930. Rinehart, J. F., and Anderson, H. H.: Effect of Emetin on Cardiac Muscle, Arch. Path., 11:546 (April), 1931.

3 J. A. M. A., 97:1096 (October 10), 1931.